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SUBJECT: NETHERLANDS/VENEZUELA: DEMARCHE ON ANTI-NGO LAW

REF: STATE 97547

Classified By: Political Counselor Andrew Schofer; reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Poloff delivered reftel demarche June 15 to MFA Venezuela desk officer Dimitri Vogelaar. According to Vogelaar, the NGO law was raised in the June 6 COLAT working group, at the EU. On June 8, a resident European Union representative met in Caracas with the Vice Foreign Minister for European Affairs and expressed concern. On the same day, France, Canada, and the UNDP met with the chairman of the Parliamentary Committee for External Affairs, Mr. Ortega. Vogelaar said other donors may also have attended the meeting. The Netherlands did not send a representative, he said, because it does not have a large development assistance program in Venezuela.

¶2. (C) According to Vogelaar, Ortega defended the draft (as expected) but promised to discuss the donors' concerns in parliament. The UNDP, Vogelaar heard, registered its strong concern. The Dutch believe that this might have made an impression on Ortega, as the UNDP runs large assistance programs in the country.

¶3. (C) According to Vogelaar, donors have noticed that the law does not appear to provide a structure for approving assistance to human rights organizations. Vogelaar had not seen the draft law personally, but said that the MFA was engaged on this issue as the GONL is concerned about its possible impact on Dutch-sponsored human rights programs.
BLAKEMAN